

VOL. XXVI
NO. 3
SPRING, 1977
SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

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Quarters





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Four Quarters

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VOL. XXVI, No. 3

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Marginalia . . .

THE END OF SOMETHING BIG

I wonder how many people in 1543 sat around pondering the discoveries of Copernicus saying, "Well, that's it. Goodbye Ptolemaic universe, hello new cosmology." Or when the census of 1890 was published, did the New York Times have a front page story on the end of the pastoral version of the American Dream? Not likely.

A fair number of them argued that Copernicus was an ivory tower nut, I'll bet; after all, everyone knew the earth was the center of the universe and man was its highest creature, the core around which the universe revolved. Similarly, Americans of 1890 could hardly have realized that the American Dream was entering a new phase in which technology rather than the land would promise fulfillment of the pursuit of happiness.

Significant transitional periods in history are not always easy to recognize when you are living through them. But it does seem as though we are right in the middle of one of those momentous transitions right now. James Truslow Adams defined the American Dream as "that dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank which is the greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world." In the 20th century, that dream has become dependent on cheap energy to fuel the vast technology that has become synonymous with "the better, richer, and happier life." What will be the effect on the American psyche now that the Dream appears to be running out of gas?

The economic and political results of the energy depletion will be debated elsewhere. Its effect on the myth known as the American Dream will be less obvious but just as serious. To understand why, you must remember that the merger of the American continent and the utopian ideal depended on America's newness and her abundance. When Europeans first saw what Fitzgerald calls "the fresh green breast of the new world," they embraced a myth; here was a second chance at Eden, truly a "new" world free from the tainted dust of the old and filled with an endless abundance "commensurate to (man's) capacity for wonder."

That myth is now threatened. We are slowly opening our eyes to a land far from being self-sufficient, far from the independence we took for granted as a corollary to our abundance.

(Continued on Page 39)

Homecoming

SHIRLEY GRAVES COCHRANE

AT FIRST he thought she was some obscure cousin come to relieve one of his mother's nurses. She unlatched the screen door cautiously, and only as he pulled it back did he recognize her, at the same moment that she recognized him.

"Claude. I wasn't expecting you." Rennie shielded her eyes. He saw now that the sun had blinded her, just as the house's darkness had blinded him.

"I said I'd come, didn't I?" His guilt came out as anger. Two months ago he'd brought her here, left to go on a series of assignments; phoning back—that was about all.

"Well, come on in the kitchen." She led the way, walking carefully, in the manner of country pregnant women.

Claude followed her back through the long dog-trot hall. On the round oak table with the clawed feet of some mythical beast, she set out minted iced tea. No beer—in his mother's house Rennie abided by his mother's preferences. They sat down, not looking directly at each other, though he studied her covertly. What disturbed him most was that she seemed to have discarded her beauty like an unneeded garment. It was not the distortions of her late pregnancy (they had been married twelve years; had never expected to have a child) but the outward signs of inner despair; low-keyed, not dangerous.

"Where's Dad?" he asked.

"Still down at the store. They've given him some temporary job. Inventory, I believe. It's been a lift for him."

His father had been retired for two years from the furniture store where he had worked most of his life.

"And Mother?" he asked.

"It won't be much longer now."

"What won't be much longer now?" He asked what he

already knew.

"The end."

"All right." He slapped his palms upon the table, as though something important had been decided. "I've arranged to stay. Brought some feature articles to work on."

"Would you like to go see her now?" Rennie asked.

"Yes," he said, rising slowly. They walked to the stairs.

His mother's room was at the back of the hall, his father's at the front. They had slept separately ever since Claude could remember; he fancied his own conception as their final act of love.

"I'd better check with the nurse," Rennie said at the top of the steps. He waited outside the room, listening to the murmur of the women's voices. Then his mother called his name.

The nurse beckoned him in. The room was dark, the air conditioner imitating the sound of sea. His mother wore a long-sleeved summer gown with "roaching" at the wrists. Her face looked like dogs' look when pulled back by the ears, the eyes prominent and frantic. The skeletal structure of the lower face was cleanly visible; the skin bronzed, as though covered with a coating of iodine. She could have been any woman in any hospital.

"Mama, I'm glad to see you," he said.

"I'm glad to see *you*, son."

"Did you get my letters?"

"Yes. Rennie read them to me. The magazine article too. I was real proud."

"I've come to stay a good long time."

"I'm glad." She turned to Rennie: "I'd like to speak to Claude alone. Could you all go out awhile?"

Rennie and the nurse left, closing the door. In his mother's long silence dread rose in Claude; ebbcd, rose again.

"Rennie's not happy," she said at last.

Relief bathed him. "Oh Mama. She's all right. It's just the baby and all that."

As though he had not spoken she went on: "She is not happy because you are not *making* her happy."

"What's she been telling you?" he asked.

"It's nothing she's said; it's what I've seen."

Blood knowledge; passed silently, woman to woman. He thought of Rennie's suppressed anger, like a clenched fist kept in the pocket.

His mother was speaking again: "It is not as easy for a man as for a woman." She paused, selected her next words. "But it would be too bad if you were to lose her."

"I'm not about to lose her, Mama." He assumed a jaunti-

ness: "I'm planning on keeping her around for a good long time."

"Then be good to her." She closed her eyes. "That is what I had to say."

Claude rose, paced the room. Ruth and Naomi, those two. First meeting, they had instantly adopted each other. Rennie, motherless since two; his mother daughterless, all but childless, he born in her fortieth year. Once a source of satisfaction to him, this closeness between them had come to seem like a conspiracy. Suddenly Claude could bear the room no longer.

"I'd better do down, see what Rennie's up to," he told his mother.

"Remember: Be good to her." She spoke it like a warning.

Downstairs Claude met his father coming in. "Good to see you son, good to see you." There was always a little awkwardness between them in greetings and good-byes. "Been up to see your mother yet?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Just been visiting with her."

"She's doing all right. Better all the time. I keep telling her that every day. Needs to put on a little weight, is all."

Claude heard him in disbelief. "Dad, haven't they *told* you?"

His father made a gesture of mild impatience. "You can't believe everything those doctors tell you. They don't know it all. I've seen people worse off than her, get back on their feet, live for years, hale and hearty. Wait'll that grandbaby gets here. That'll perk her up."

"I'm not going to argue with you," Claude told him, tamping down his anger.

Rennie came from the kitchen with a glass, a straw angled in it. "Oh Papa, if you're going up, would you take this?"

Claude watched his father mount the stairs, bringing both feet to each step before going on to the next. His frame still held something of a boy's gawkiness. The back of his neck was quilted, like a farmer's.

Claude followed Rennie into the kitchen. "So now begins the long death watch," she said.

In the days that followed Claude felt the pull toward constant, mind-numbing work—his father's trick of keeping busy to avoid thinking. He took down the ancient green kitchen shades pin-pricked with light and put up louvered shutters, painted both kitchen and downstairs bath. In the back yard he resurrected the swing, built onto a platform and suspended from metal scaffolding, that had long been going to ruin. In the evenings he would often sit there with Rennie, talking carefully, never touching, in the manner of his father and mother.

He and his father would rise early, breakfast together. They talked little, yet there was remembered companionship between them. His father had always been the breakfast-cooker. On one visit to his mother Claude had almost mentioned this fact but stopped himself. Though he could talk to his father about *her*, whenever he tried to talk to her about his father, he felt an overwhelming embarrassment, almost as though such talk were obscene.

Once, going upstairs to join his father in her room, he heard her voice rising in anger—a diatribe in which he could make out no words. She stopped when he entered. His father stood at the foot of her bed, taking his whipping with no outcry.

In periods of remission from pain, his mother was strangely serene. She would talk of her girlhood home, a landscape of gentle mountains where she and her sister had been raised by their mother and other widowed gentlewomen, remote from contacts with men. She would tell of deer coming to the back door and of the mountains covered in fall tweed and of the goldenrod of August blooming beside June's dead stalks of Queen Anne's lace. She spoke of these things as though telling fairy tales to children.

In his mother's presence Claude would take pains to be attentive to Rennie. Yet there was no carry-over when they were alone. His awkwardness, her coldness? He could not be sure. Once on the small writing desk Rennie used, he came across one of her scribbled poems. It ended:

My road to hell is paved
with all your good intentions
and I am wintered out
with waiting.

She had titled it "Warning."

It was with his father that Claude felt most at ease in the shadowed household. They communicated through familiar objects, one evening getting out the old game of Chinese checkers (in Claude's boyhood fancy, the first such set ever introduced in America). Some of the marbles had been lost and imperfectly replaced, yellow having three substitute gold beads; red, two mottled shooters. His father had always been winner, never yielding to pity for Claude's lesser skill. Now they were more evenly matched. The first night Claude won one game, his father the next. Every night from then on they played a dogged set in total silence.

It was during such a contest that the nurse came into the room and spoke to Rennie. The two left, Rennie returning shortly, her eyes wide as a child's who has beheld some wonder.

"I think this is it. You had better come," she said, immediately going out again.

Claude's father half-rose, hesitant. He had taken off his shoes and now groped for them beneath the card table. He found them but could not get them on. "Fetch me my shoehorn," he said to Claude.

"God damn it, Dad, there's no *time*," Claude exploded. "Just go in your stocking feet."

But his father seemed compelled to act out the shoe ritual. Claude ripped out the shoelaces, stuffed his father's feet into the shoes, hurried him to the stairs. Partway up, his father said: "You go on ahead. I have to take it easy."

Claude raced up the steps to his mother's room, moved quickly to her bed. Her eyes groped but could not reach him; yet she seemed to know he was there. It was as if she had been waiting for him, as if she had one thing yet left to say. For a moment she seemed to struggle back, hold off the force that was winning with her. Animals giving birth looked like this, fighting against the force that held them. Then it was over; not life but the struggle for it. Claude felt within himself the pure relief of her yielding.

The nurse said, "The hearing is the last thing to leave. Talk to her. She can still hear you."

"Mama." He could think of nothing more.

His father was coming down the long hall now. Too late.

The quality of her breathing changed. Harsher, shuddering. Then again the letting it have its way with her. Death claimed her gradually; Claude could not tell the exact moment. The nurse moved to the bed, closed the eyes, smoothed the face. The peace. The sculptured peace.

His father entered. Came to stand beside the bed; reached out, fingered the trim on her gown. Touched her hair. A remembered tenderness seemed to guide him. He spoke her name three times, as though still disputing the point of death.

Rennie, sitting by the bedside, uttered what seemed like some ancient mourning chant: known to women, unlearnable by men. Claude moved toward her but could not touch her; not even here, at death point.

The nurse spoke with a certain urgency: "Now if you will all just go downstairs, I'll tend to everything." She readied things, as for childbirth.

His father turned and shambled out; Claude followed. Rennie stayed behind a moment, conferring with the nurse. Downstairs, it was Rennie who called the doctor and after he had come and gone, the undertaker.

HIS MOTHER was to be buried at her family burying ground, fifty miles by the interstate. They went in the funeral-home limousine, a modest string of cars following, headlights on in needless signalling.

His father identified old homesites, read names of lost hamlets off green day-glo signs, gave out pieces of local history. Rennie acknowledged his information with a slight hum, gazing out the window. She said nothing, Claude little. The driver of the limousine was a robot programmed for sympathy. Claude's father spoke carefully, clearing his throat. There was a sort of conscientiousness to his talk, as though he were hired tour guide.

They turned off the interstate and travelled a blacktop road for several miles, turning from this onto dirt road. Farmland sloped downward; in the background floated the shadow-forms of mountains.

At the gravesite a tent had been erected. A mound of earth stood ready for spading. Some mechanical contrivance would lower the plain grey coffin—one his mother might have picked out for herself. Claude recognized the old minister who had married his mother and father, a memory-figure of boyhood. In a frail voice he read Bible passages, mouthed words Claude could comprehend little of. Abruptly the service ended. Was this all? Did you just go off? Anonymous dark-suited men stood in the background, waiting to finish up. Slowly Claude moved with the rest of the party toward the house, his mother's birth-place, now home of his first cousin Birdie, old enough to be his aunt. Neighbors, family, had brought tribal offerings of potato salad, layer cake, as though gluttony were the natural end product of grief. Cousin Birdie moved among them, urging everyone to eat.

Afterwards she took Claude and Rennie into a back bedroom and rattled through bureau drawers, pressing trinkets and linens and handmade baby garments on them. She gave him a worn brown envelope, "Mama's pictures" lettered across the front.

"I divided them up," she explained. "There were two of most of them. The ones of your papa and mama—I'm giving all those to you."

RIDING BACK, his father, run out of talk, gazed at the landscape. Rennie slept. Looking at her, Claude felt a new tenderness. Her belly swelled gently where his child grew. Already it seemed like an actual presence. Uniting them? Divid-

ing them further? Rennie, who had tended his mother in her last days, would soon be tending his child.

They had supper on trays in the parlor. Afterwards Claude's father excused himself and went into the kitchen. Claude and Rennie sat awhile in silence, finally rose to gather up the supper things. In the kitchen they found his father arranging the envelope of pictures from Cousin Birdie on the oak dining table, which he had ovalled with extra leaves. In slow motion he placed each picture in its proper time-slot, like the playing of some arcane solitaire.

Claude studied the repeating images of his father and mother—younger, handsomer, than he could imagine their ever having been; happier than he had seen evidence of. Carefully his father made room for another picture in the row of courtship scenes. It showed the two of them before a waterfall, she holding his straw skimmer, he her picture hat. A pain shuddered through Claude; all lost happiness seemed captured in this photograph. His father now began arranging some formal portraits in gradual changes of pose, making almost the effect of a movie. Although Claude knew the portraits had to be of his mother, he had never seen this clear an evidence of her early beauty. Why had these pictures been hidden from him?

"How lovely she was," Rennie marvelled.

Claude's father began talking in his tour-guide voice: He named the year Claude's mother had come to their town to teach, the very day he had first laid eyes on her; she walking with some other teachers down the street where he stood with cronies before the drug store. All the young men in town had wanted her, pursuing her tastelessly; only *he* had known how to approach a lady like her. He had made friends with her landlady, arranged an introduction, taken her on walks, then rides, then picnics, "gradually working up."

All heads turned "as that pair passed" (his father spoke in third person). "You maybe couldn't believe it now, but they were as handsome as any couple you might see in a magazine. She by far the better-looking, though he could turn the ladies' eyes right well himself." Everyone admired them, he said—the whole town turning out for their wedding. "The courtship of the decade. The town watched it like a movie. Ask any older citizen. *They'll* tell you."

Rennie uttered one of her acknowledging hums, fingered photographs, then abruptly turned and walked outside.

"Why don't we get a big album, put all these pictures in it?" Claude suggested. But this did not seem to interest his father, intent on his present arrangement, which now almost

filled the table top. After a few minutes Claude excused himself: "Guess I'd better go out—see about Rennie."

From the spill of houselight he could see her in the backyard swing, legs up, arms wrapping them. The child inside her like a nested doll. He tried to capture the tenderness of that afternoon but could not. What he felt instead was an almost desperate sadness. It seemed at first associated with his parents, then to extend to himself and Rennie.

Always, generations built along the same fault line. His and Rennie's marriage, trenched along his parents' course. Lying in bed like two corpses in a common grave. Meeting in the hall, murmuring "excuse me." Eating the silent meal. Their child doomed in its turn. Where begun, where ended?

Rennie turned, as though to answer this question. She looked at him a moment, then away, offering no welcome. He walked toward her; she unmoved, unmovng. Sitting down opposite her, he set the matched swings to a gentle rocking. Still she did not speak.

He lit a cigarette, leaned back. Rennie kept her silence.

"Are you unhappy with me?" he asked at last, realizing at once that the question was too blunt, maybe also tinged with self-pity.

"Yes," she said simply.

"Do you want to leave me then?" he asked, surprised at a feeling almost like terror climbing his neck.

"Where would I go?" she asked hopelessly. "Live here with your dad?" Her own father could give her no shelter.

"Should I leave you then?" he asked, as calmly as though they were deciding who would take the car for the day.

"Could you send me money?" she asked.

"Not enough."

"Well then . . ."

"Maybe," he said at last, "we can hang on. Move on to something better. It hasn't always been this way."

It was lame, inadequate. Perhaps already he had lost her. He reached out, surprised at the near shock of their touching. She did not draw back—instead, quickly took his hand. "We'll see," she said.

His father came to the back door to call: "Anybody want some coffee? I'm gonna make some. Eat some cake."

"I would, Papa," Rennie answered. Then softly to Claude: "He's lonely. I'll go on in."

"I'll be in soon," he said.

He helped her from the swing. She walked to the house, turned at the door to look back. Yielding? He could not be

certain.

He sat listening to the random sounds of summer: the barking of a dog, like a steady coughing, the squeals of summer game players, one child's high wail cutting off abruptly. It came back to him how, on summer nights, hopped up from summer games like "ain't no buggar bears" he would look out of his bedroom window, down upon his father sitting where he now sat, his cigarette making a fiery point upon the night. In some other time, some other place, a child of his would look out of its bedroom window, see *his* cigarette upon the dark; curl back, reassured, into sleep.

Remedial Student Suffers A Death In The Family

DANIEL MINOCK

When she comes back to classes,
stomach sore from deep thought,
nobody wants to hear about it.
Nobody believes it.
She didn't believe it either at first.
Later she understood the warnings.
It was the meaning of going from Dostoevsky
to hives of carbon atoms. It was the meaning
of the bells that caught her
on the stairs to Philosophy.
It was the meaning of the ticking
against the windows
as she tried to think in a hurry
of the feminine form of *serieux*.
Now she promises to be there, promises papers,
fits herself slowly back into life. Now
she knows she'll fail.

Final Countdown

ELEANOR SHIEL ZITO

X

Celluloid tiger, Pier Paolo
stalking the narrow twisting hobbled
cobble streets of Roman ghettos
preying on *The Violent Life*, pawing
the beast in a blue collar, finding
the stench of winding down inevitable.

IX

Scent of a nobody in a bistro
near the Termini, All Hallows Night,
luring on late, the eleventh hour,
to leap into your life, your Alfa Romeo—
Tigre Maschio! To be a somebody,
"Pasolini's newest discovery."

VIII

Making tracks at a midnight supper
this neo-Adonis long-haired cub
prowling your past, your *Ricotta* Christ—
your harlot hung upon a Cross—
obscenity to the pompous pillars,
affront to the establishment.

VII

Soft growl of protest, comrade—
constant assurance that you,
like Ussuri tigers are harmless
except to fat cats and hunters;
stay free—bite even fellow travelers
quivering over pinned dogs.

VI

Night walk, a whisper, the forest,
bared beach of Ostia, ancient seaport
among the ruins where Augustine
lost himself in a passion older,
fiercer than this feral burning
creeping in your sinewy heart.

V

(Pier Paolo Pasolini . . .
long hours I've watched your *Gospel*
in the dimness of cinema coming
to love your irresistible Jesus
baiting the Pharisees, pulling
the poor to His heart, dying for them.

IV

It was your world and ours—
lustful, treacherous, violent Babylon—
Christ died for;
its swell of naked evil
makes that lonely death
all the more beautiful.

III

In your eyes I saw, through
your ears heard His singular way,
not your agnostic cry but Christ
revealing to the broken-hearted
to poor and rejected ones—His love.
Can you be lost among the happy number?)

II

Now on a dirt road suddenly
fangs of challenger bared, night wind rising
rushing through old yews, tall pines
blow after blow, a fall of bloody rain, great drops
burst of red flares, Roman candles
stars flung down, trailing their brilliance
across the battered head,
last take . . . fade . . . darkness

THE END

I

Povero tigre
caught in the absolute freeze
no mob scene, prop or priest,
no Dismas to whisper Remember . . .
still, on the other side of violence
The Lamb.

Thunderclouds with Angles

A. McA. MILLER

I remember the grillework:
a lace of cross-hatched grille-strips
two feet wide,
immensely high it seemed to me,
it ran forever down the overhung eaves
of the porch;
soft brown birds would gather
in that grillework
When the sun hung southward on the bay
the lattice work would splay and notch
its checkered shadows on the wall
as if the rusted heads of nails
and eyelid-heavy curls of paint
themselves were moving equal
with the motion of the sun, but
upward, so at sunset, the shadow
would fold itself against the ceiling
and roll tight on the lattice,
itself a solid shadow of gray paint
except through the grille
the color of sunset bled
each evening when the high hotel caught fire,
sunrise ran out of the windows
licking up the soft wood ceiling;
birds flew behind their shadows,
black leaves from the fire;
and the lattice threw
its grille of darkness
out so far
gray folded smoke stamped shadows
on the thunderclouds
where I see them now
in south Miami
as the rain
is always
about to fall

The Saint Who Came to Heel

GEORGE GREENE

RANK AND FILE drafts outside Waverley Station sprinted up ankles and down necks, badgering newcomers to don woolens before entering the city. Mr. Leier stood his ground, his glance fixed on the rising pavement which led like a drawbridge to the street. Overhead a glass roof funneled a major wind carrying more cryptic dispatches of its own. No one else took any notice of it. The only others waiting were two housewives reckoning the value of prizes captured during a shopping raid south of the border.

At last a human voice came out of the hubbub.

"Mr. Thomas Leier?"

The wind switched course like an irresolute shark. A large man stood a few feet away. Apparently he had trained himself never to startle strangers. One beefy hand paused at the rim of his cap, preparing to doff it. He had the eyes of a first sergeant with a clandestine passion for the works of Lewis Carroll.

"You must be Uncle Simon."

"Damn me, lad, if you're not right. Stand at ease."

Though an ordained minister, Simon was notorious for his incautious speech. Mr. Leier's mother always claimed her brother had never recovered from a wartime stint as a military chaplain. It had taken him to the R.A.F. base where they trained guard dogs. Enlisted men had to live twenty-four hours a day with their animals. During Sunday services it grew plain no ordinary appeals from the pulpit would command silence. That was when Simon's tongue first slipped out of gear.

Mr. Leier got ready to hail a taxi.

"Why not walk?" Simon asked with zest. "You'll be only a few blocks from my flat. I wish I could put you up, but since Margaret was taken I've moved into a wee cave. There's scarcely enough space for Malcolm and myself."

Mr. Leier wanted to say something cordial about Malcolm, but data pertaining to his mother's family had always been in

short supply. He fixed on the other name. "I'm sorry I never met Aunt Margaret. Mother read her letters aloud. Sometimes they were quite funny."

After another moment Uncle Simon signaled for a halt. His bulk blocked the sidewalk while he fumbled with a wallet.

He thrust out a snapshot like an identification tag. "There she is," he said, his voice suddenly hoarse. "She was the most loyal of adjutants." He shut his eyes, unmindful of passers-by. Some bugle might have warned it was time for a break. "We pledged that whoever went first would keep in touch. The worst pain of Hell must be its silence." He looked over his shoulder as if another traveler might still be waiting. "Now I know I lacked faith. Communication is God's specialty."

"She's lovely," said Mr. Leier, and she was. The picture showed a puzzled face with a thin nose and eyes chastened by moors where dreamers humanized a rocky soil with stealthy visions and lost causes.

Simon led the way noisily toward Princess Street. On their left loomed the Victorian shrine guarding the wistful brow of Sir Walter Scott. Nearby, like a poor relation, stood an uncovered statue of David Livingstone.

"There's the cannier man," said Simon, saluting the missionary. "Africa taught him secrets we have yet to apply. He wasn't afraid to swim against the stream. He knew the danger of ingrained habits. It's go-ahead men who do God's work, not sissies. That's how he came to see beyond the horizon. He knew the one trait in Jesus scholars have missed was His earthiness."

Simon stared at his nephew as if guessing his I.Q. Straightening up, Mr. Leier started singing the words to "Amazing Grace."

Simon chuckled, the weary chuckle—half a cough—of one who has renounced levity. "Are you fond of music, then?"

"Mother read from the Bible. Afterwards she would explain."

"Not all the parables are yet in the public record. It may be your commission to carry a new one across the water. God sends colonists signals also. There's a call to stir someone who is at least half Scot."

They marched the rest of the way in silence. It was as if Mr. Leier were being escorted to meet a new C.O. He had trouble sustaining the pace.

That morning he had boarded the train at King's Cross feeling as vulnerable as the hero of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. He was relieved to get out of London. He had not yet learned to stop interfering in lives being run on premises totally foreign to his

own. Today he had taken off his glasses so that he would be less susceptible. But he could not help overhearing his neighbors, two men and a woman. They worked for the Ministry of the Environment, and they were being sent to a conference.

Farming country unrolled like speeded-up technicolor, blurring even more after gusts of rain. From time to time they raced past steel mills and pottery kilns. Then they seemed to be climbing stealthily. At Newcastle one of the environment men wrinkled his nose. "This city brews the strongest beer in the kingdom," he said, sniffing. "You can smell it from the station."

Mr. Leier warned himself not to twist every chance remark into a cry of the soul. When he came back from the dining car his caution slackened. He volunteered that his mother had come from Edinburgh.

"The Athens of the North," said the official sourly. "They've cleaned up Auld Reekie. Now citizens browse at will in their own private smogs."

The man sounded as if he ached to catch out Americans. During his sabbatical Mr. Leier had found this to be a game almost as popular as orgasm among English librarians. He squinted at a treeless slope, vacant except for reconnoitering sheep. Finally the craving for dialogue won out. He said, "At least those animals have licked urban sprawl."

The humming wheels had lulled everyone else into taking a nap.

Too late he grasped that the civil servant was also a compulsive exhorter. "Mark my word," the man said as they took down their bags. "Don't expect Greek proportion at this latitude." He might have been polishing a retort for the past hour. Mr. Leier was hard pressed not to introduce himself.

Uncle Simon's Rose Street flat overlooked a courtyard filled with motorcycles and trash cans. It had the willed composure of a G-2 office for some commando battalion. Outside, the pavement shone as if work details scrubbed it each dawn. Freshly ironed curtains had done duty in more than one parsonage. A map of the Middle East hung on one wall, and there were lamps with high-powered bulbs, refugees from a more ambitious room. The City of God open on a desk might have been a guide explaining the badges of an opposing army.

"It's jammed," Simon admitted. "I couldn't abandon some of those things Margaret and I had shopped for together."

"You're centrally located."

"This is just a supply dump. Our real work goes on elsewhere."

They had agreed to dine out, and by the time Mr. Leier

arrived Simon had changed into clerical garb. "They call them dog collars in this country," he said darkly, adjusting his neckband. "I trust they show better manners in America." He had cut himself while shaving. Dried blood defaced the stiff cloth. He might have been sworn to secrecy about wounds sustained behind enemy lines.

There was a scratching noise at the kitchen door.

"Malcolm is very tidy. He always attends to his needs outdoors."

When Simon came back he was followed by a black sheep dog with bloodshot eyes and a tail which rose like a shako. Malcolm flopped down, jostling one of the lamps. With his disorganized coat the dog looked like a scholar who has ruined his vision. The watchful stare implied he might be working at the task of not drawing attention.

"We eat out much of the time," Simon said. "It's hellish getting a woman, even for casual cleaning."

"Why not take Malcolm with us?"

Simon clapped his hands as if his guest had spoken the right password. The loud report made Mr. Leier look at them. They were the hands of a stevedore.

At the Cafe Cameron Mr. Leier started to unbend. Uncle Simon abstained from inquiries about who had been locked away and who else was sleeping around. He studied the menu as if it were a divinity journal. "Malcolm gets scraps when no one observes." Simon whispered, using the large card as a screen. "He can't handle salmon because of the bones, and he's tired of haggis."

A waitress, forlornly patient, listened at his elbow. It was no accident that this city bragged about its monument to canine virtue. Malcolm stood guard under the table, displaying rare faith that nobody would kick him.

After the soup Mr. Leier sought out the lavatory to stretch his limbs.

"The great thing," Simon went on, "is that I'm healthier now than when I was a pastor. I prefer living in a city. I've occupied a number of pulpits as a guest. People are more tolerant." Something made the thick neck redden. "Would you credit it? There were inns in the hills where they refused him entrance."

Buttering a slice of bread, Mr. Leier thought he had missed some allusion to the New Testament. Then he sensed his error.

Simon brought up an article he was submitting to the *Inverness Inquirer*. "I bruise a few jaws," he said heartily. A row of stained glass windows filled one wall. Their noisy colors

seemed to excite him. The windows honored inventors and men of science. There was even one commemorating Benjamin Franklin.

"It's nice to see one of my countrymen."

Simon was not to be sidetracked.

"Indeed, Franklin ties in with what I want to say. He would have turned out better if it hadn't been for the witch hunters. There's nothing like too much logic to scare off a man from new discoveries. With their pseudo-proofs about how reason catches God in a kitten and mouse game they drove him into pretending to be Mr. Never-at-a-Loss. That's been our mistake, tactically speaking. We never look around for new alternatives with which to broadcast the Word. I've lost patience with those gelded jackals on the B.B.C."

It was stirring to observe Uncle Simon corner a topic like a terrier after a rat. This single-minded zeal had alienated numerous audiences. One poignant letter from Margaret had reported how her spouse had been asked to sever links with his first congregation after the war. She had never forgiven the R.A.F. His early retirement had probably grown out of a more recent squabble. Watching where he placed his feet, Mr. Leier realized his uncle was also marked with the brand of the controversialist. As if forestalling objections, Simon proceeded to set straight the record.

"Run-of-the mill churchgoers are more drawn to splitting hairs about rival isms than to hunting out the lair of the Holy Spirit. That's what we overlook. God is like a wildcat. He changes dwellings every year." Simon might have warned himself about his companion's background. "One of the signs of an analytical mind is a distrust of metaphor. I respect that rule. My cornerstone," he spread his hands as if putting one block on another, "is that no one—surely no one since Kierkegaard—can do justice to the Gospel message by limiting himself to the so-called laws of reason."

Yet Simon had full faith in the possibility of new revelations. "Our theologians have tried so hard to outshine Pilate that they've become a separate species." Both beefy hands snapped shut in defiance. "They've tarried too long in upper space. We'd do better studying children. I remind you how forcibly Christ hammered at this point. And what do you notice about bairns? How they make use of everything at hand."

After a third glass of claret the convergence of Ben Franklin and Kierkegaard struck Mr. Leier as funny. He tried to share this reaction.

"You miss the point." Simon cleared his throat with a roar.

He crushed his napkin against his mouth. He might have been tempted to gag a backward Sunday school pupil. "I want nothing to do with self-approbation, which is the gravest sin of schoolmasters. Those names epitomize the crises of the last two centuries."

There was a commotion at their feet. Malcolm peered out like a morose highland chief who has been ignored at the wrong end of a banquet table. A moment later Simon, almost inaudible now, asked that they leave.

Exploring Edinburgh, it grew easier to follow Uncle Simon's deft leaps between rigor and rhapsody. He dragged Mr. Leier up and down hills as if exposure to varying heights might make him less cold-blooded. At Holyrood Palace they stood in the room where Rizzio, Queen Mary's secretary, had been murdered. Down in the courtyard plain-clothes men were planning for a visit by the royal family of the Netherlands. Their voices had the prim caution of ghosts who know they are in all the textbooks. On another day the two men clattered over cobblestones through a series of gates, each one more arduous to reach than its predecessor, as they mounted toward Edinburgh Castle. Simon had been wrong about one thing. The more heartily Mr. Leier breathed, the more he found himself drawn to metaphor rather than to logic. The salty air tasted of night raids, crusades grown brutish, men scaling walls with daggers between their teeth.

"Two millennia of gore," said Simon.

The next afternoon they stood in the resonant silence of St. Giles's Cathedral, mother shrine of the Church of Scotland. Simon had pointed out the painstaking skill of the wood carving in the Thistle Chapel, and the resting places of noblemen who had betrayed one another over insanely snarled disputes.

"Doesn't it give you pause? This is not just the fate of my own land. I need not bring up the blood baths on your side of the ocean." He coughed as if chastising himself for being boastful.

Mr. Leier had grown dazed by the chasm between Simon's *ad libitum* speech and his habit of sliding away from point-blank assertions.

"There has been as much blindness inside as assaults from without." Simon pressed his advantage. "We had better start reviewing our strategy. Most clergymen have sold out to the whore of prudence. Piss on them."

"Where does that take us?"

Simon made no reply. He seized Mr. Leier's arm. "I know where to take you," he said impishly. "We'll just have time before tea."

The Royal Infirmary was a group of buildings near the University of Edinburgh Medical School. The structures rose, damp gray, across the road from one of those private schools which seemed to constitute the main industry of the city. Uncle Simon charged up three flights. At the end of a long hall they found themselves in a ward containing eight high beds at decent intervals. In several beds old men tried to rest. They looked tense in their socks and slippers, as if a fire drill bell might convulse their world. Between beds other patients sat in silence. From one corner came the noise of a television set. A bartering voice called out the rules of some game as if it were selling tickets to the Last Judgment.

Simon saluted smartly in front of one of the sitting men. A leathery skull intimated the man had been bald for a long time. His blue eyes had shrunk until there was a disproportionate gap between them and the tip of his nose. Skinny fingers played with the sleeves of his bathrobe. This garment looked as if it had spent decades in a tin-lined trunk, invulnerable to moths, and had been pressed into use on his return. It had withstood time better than its owner.

"Be at ease, Jude."

The man had a knack of making his eyes veer like a barn swallow, combating the immobility now forced on his torso. Spittle formed in tiny pools at each corner of his mouth. He dabbed at his eyes with a wet finger. That might have been his only means of keeping them open.

Simon introduced his nephew as if ordering a platoon to count off, including with a bold wave any of the others who wanted to draw near. They could not be excused from courts of inquiry meeting in front of each face. Only the man whom Simon had singled out responded. He tilted his skull back and forth like a child testing how many grimaces he could pull without a teacher catching him. When Simon's back was turned the man clapped his hands. It was not Yeats's symbol of bravery in the midst of decay so much as the act of a master scoffing at an amateur magician.

"Jude keeps a sharp vigil," said Uncle Simon. "He was a missionary. He labored in Africa for forty years." Simon drew up a chair, patting the high-strung fingers. "Isolation helped him to smell the corpses left behind by unworthy stewards. That's not a truth found in libraries. It comes when enforced silence makes us look twice."

The eyes widened as if astounded anyone still survived who had known him before he became a caricature.

"Jude made a special study of native cults. I was ignorant

in those days. When he came home on leave we were always glad. Women were drawn to him. Margaret was one of them, even though he was quite a bit older. He was a great one for practical jokes. Once he came down to breakfast in a mask, all ticklish feathers and the color of fresh blood. Our serving lass let out a scream that was heard in the Hebrides."

Jude's eyes swelled until they spilled over. Wet gullies on his cheeks looked like some cosmetic misapplied by a blind man who has not, even now, escaped from the vice of vanity.

"No one comes anymore." Simon scowled at the false promises vaulting from the television screen. "He makes them feel disgust. I notice it among the nurses. He wets the bed. Yet you see how well he communicates. He doesn't need common speech. God has granted him a pause when he can purge himself. He has a range of insight aptly defined by Gregory the Great, one of the few Popes I can read without vomiting. Gregory said, 'Holy Scripture is a stream of running water, where alike the elephant may swim, and the lamb walk without losing its feet.'"

Mr. Leier pushed his glasses closer to his face. The skull shed the heat of a pulsating egg out of which some obscene shape was fighting to get itself born. One of the eyes rolled as if it had been set adrift from inside.

"We agonized over how far you could push the sacredness of life," Simon went on. "It's only lately that I've grasped the full scope of that idea. I used to bring parishioners to get the benefit of Jude's testimony. Their bowels dissolved with dread."

Outside in the street Mr. Leier felt nervous. He wanted company to attend a film, but his uncle would not commit himself.

"They run deserving music events during the summer. I haven't found time even for Handel."

Simon explained that he spent his evenings studying.

Mr. Leier thought of the copy of St. Augustine. He said, "Theology?"

"Only when I need amusement. I've climbed out of that dunghill. Now I gain more profit from books on botany and animals."

Simon did consent to return to the hotel for dinner. Mr. Leier skipped any reference to Malcolm. For once he wanted to enjoy food without having his legs bent in the knots of an escape artist. As if to allow his nephew time in which to retrieve his manners, Simon insisted that they walk.

They sat in the clamorous bar. Settling himself, Simon stared around. "This is the crown of the day," he said, "and look at them missing its voices. I often take Malcolm for his stroll

at twilight. We march up to the Old City along the Mound. Did you know that road is heated in winter so that buses won't crash?"

Mr. Leier burned to ask about the voices, but no opening came.

Simon scanned faces, avoiding his nephew's gaze. "You won't see rainbows inside these walls. This is a camp for mercenaries. The essence of life is its abnormality—that's what sin did. You must work in order to catch normal moments. Rainbows are among the most normal phenomena in existence. That's why Malcolm and I seek them out. Jude tells me they had glorious ones in the bush country, like a foretaste of the New Jerusalem. They'll never track down any big questions in this smoke. Salvation depends on asking the big questions. You need space for that. You won't hear the rustle of a wildcat outside this hole, only a few rats raiding the garbage pails."

After dinner Simon grew more evasive. "I keep a lamp burning, but Malcolm isn't used to the flat. The windows rattle. He thinks someone wants to break in."

Alone in his room, Mr. Leier switched on the radio, but the baleful revelry of a bagpipe competition drove him to change the station. Another voice was defending the Byzantine delusions of the Stuarts. He scanned a list of films. The largest advertisement named a saga in which a cadre of sharks took over the oceans of the world and—under the sway of a Chinese scientist—threatened man's hope of expanding his food supply. Six months ago in the States he had sat amused by *Sovereign Scavengers*. Now its plot gave off the vaguely nauseous odor of moth balls.

He left the hotel and marched down the hill. To the south he could make out the massive heap of the Castle. Searchlights poured against its upper reaches as if to guide visitors from other planets. A trick of light had turned the western sky into an underground cavern. It was hard not to grow light-headed.

He retraced his steps.

Lamps still burned in Uncle Simon's place. Someone answered the buzzer. He had a vision of two inflamed eyes judging him as he ascended. With relief he identified the bulky form of his uncle.

"I knew you'd be back." Simon's voice carried down the stairs as if he were consoling a man in solitary confinement.

"Don't your ghosts ever sleep? Outdoors I keep hearing scraps of talk when there is no one around. One of the voices might have been your famous Burke. Wasn't he the murderer who sold corpses for dissection?"

"You're misconstruing the whispers of the Holy Spirit, lad.

Few colonists have an ear for pure Scots speech."

Once inside, his uncle scurried around, torn between laughter and frowns. He might have been playing at being the lady of the house.

"I could tell Jude liked you. He's been given a frightful responsibility."

"I didn't say three words."

Simon gave no sign of having heard. When he had laid out the things for coffee he went to the bedroom door. "Malcolm, are you still awake?"

The dog padded in. This time he did not limit himself to the floor. He made straight for the chair where Uncle Simon customarily sat. He composed himself like someone preparing to take petitions.

Simon looked at his guest. "Yesterday I couldn't explain the real reason why I felt overwrought. Did you catch what Jude whispered as you and I were leaving?"

His uncle shifted one of the lamps to monitor his reaction.

"I'm like one of your dull congregation members. Don't forget I'm an American. We're the last of the cannibals. We give a saint's name to a city and then consider all debts paid. The man who first stumbled upon us named the island Holy Savior. Afterwards he started carving up Indians. The one fact everyone knows about our biggest city is that its real owners were screwed out of it for less than thirty dollars. We're not hungry for new ways of seeing. We grow panicky because of what we've seen already."

"You do yourself wrong. God was working when He sent you."

"Working for what?"

Outside there was a banging noise as if someone were raging at culpable ignorance.

"Tell him, Malcolm."

The dog sneezed—he might have been ordered to play dead. The chaotic light from outside had breached the wall and was coalescing around the lamp. It gave a halo to the shaggy head which fixed its attention, reproachfully, on its owner.

Simon knelt, both hands spread on the arms of the chair. "We've all been screwing around." He grinned as if he had been jolted into ransoming a lost word. "At last God has committed His shock troops. Not everyone will be vouchsafed grace to pay heed. But they'll help those whom the Lord elects to survive. It started on a small scale in Africa. That was where Jude got wind of it. I never dreamed God would send me the first one ever assigned this far north. A special mission like this makes

a pup frail, and our winters are brutal."

Malcolm's eyes glowed with the strain of not cheapening a grace into a trick. That night Mr. Leier lingered in the hotel bar until driven out. He had a dim memory of having pleaded indigestion and of stumbling down the stairs. The ancient room service waiter paused as if a guest were dying and might embarrass the management. After the third call the waiter let himself in while Mr. Leier sat shivering.

By dint of talking out loud and using his fingers, he tried to list the facts. He knew, for one thing, that Uncle Simon's only son worked for an oil company in Kuwait. Now it struck him why Simon had never named any local kin who were still living. He felt trapped between an urge to laugh and bouts of moaning, during one of which the waiter shuffled in. The man answered no further calls.

The next morning there was no reply either at Simon's flat. Everyone else might have been put on an air raid alert. In the vacant street Mr. Leier had to hold up both arms before cornering a taxi. He had started to sweat. He could not recall Jude's family name, but the ward number had lodged in his mind. Half hoping to be stopped, he tiptoed down the hall.

Simon was sitting next to Jude, interpreting the moist mutterings which apparently had been in progress for some time. Jude took no notice of tardy disciples. He was deep in some ritual which only he and the dog shared. He seemed to be pacing himself so that he could stammer what he had to say. He almost fell out of his chair trying to pat the recalcitrant fur.

Simon rose, smiling his wily first sergeant's smile. "We told the matron we had to ready Jude for a final chat with a foreign admirer. That's how we got in before regular visiting hours. Did Malcolm hint last night that you should report here?"

Simon moved quickly lest any recruit mar the dignity of the scene.

"Time to quick march," he said. He patted his old friend on the neck. "Jude has been filling in the picture. Today we'll take our exercise at the cemetery. From now on carrying messages will be one way of proving the authenticity of your ministry—like the gift of tongues back at the start. Malcolm may have something to relay from Margaret. Being a witness, lad, will strengthen you."

No obstacles could obliterate whatever course the R.A.F. had provided in reading maps. Twice Uncle Simon commanded the cabby to use short cuts.

"Piss on it!" he shouted. "Can't we make more haste?"

His pink tongue protruding, the dog pushed across Mr.

Leier's knees as if to guide them in the wake of some quarry.

"Speak gently, Malcolm." Simon stared dreamily at some docile assembly. "She was always one for gentleness."

The driver might have been looking in his mirror. He left without delay. Watching the abrupt retreat, Mr. Leier suppressed an urge to call out.

Malcolm broke free while Simon admired his ecstatic lunges. Pursuing the animal, the big man made unnatural, panting noises.

Mr. Leier thought he might have knocked off his glasses. On the far side of the cemetery wall the level ground had been heaved up in a makeshift defense line until it formed yet another slope, the top of which disappeared into dour rain clouds. At the blurred point between earth and sky a rainbow waited like a dangling ladder. As he advanced he could see that the lower end of the ladder was already disintegrating, casting off millions of burning particles into the void.

Overhead he heard a familiar wind, circling closer. It might have been waiting for a postponed rendezvous. At this height it had more room for maneuver than near public buildings. From its center came the wheezing of the man with the obscene skull. The shriveled voice shook like that of a prophet who has finally been granted the judgment for which he has fasted. The harangue lapsed from wrath into laughter, piercing the wind as if warning off a rival from some prey. Incontinent in sound as in other things, the voice collapsed into gasps, fighting to rid itself of the mortal exhaustion of too many hills—hills baked by the oven heat of Daniel's den, frozen winter hills closer to home, hills which lured a man at dusk into a valley where he was too blighted to keep open his eyes without dabs of spit.

Uncle Simon had stopped short. For the first time Mr. Leier seized both the stevedore's hands, wrenching them free from one another. Beyond these trenches rose the unscathed moor, renewed by rain which descended as nature meant it to from the Firth of Forth and, dimmer still, from the Kingdom of Fife. He spoke these names aloud. He had seen more than his full of men who mutilated themselves smuggling Hebrew fanaticism to this latitude. Inside his head a reserve unit charged forward led by heroes from farther west in the Mediterranean—Odysseus coolly disposing of enemies in the unhaunted air of Ithaca, and Roland, whose only monument was that he had died well.

Mr. Leier tried to summon the dog, but he could not get its name right. He cupped his hands, his ears ringing as if he had outdared all others in speech. "You fraud! We wouldn't name a

chamber pot after you!" The animal paid no heed. He ducked behind a worn Celtic cross which marked the border between graves and open country.

As if training a pair of binoculars, Mr. Leier squinted harder. From the voiceless bushes he caught a new sound. He tried to judge its distance in terms of yards. A fierce sun had pounced like a last-ditch weapon being rolled downhill. He fell to his knees so that he could shield himself. A humming broke past the barricade of his ears, blocking out the names of as yet uncalled defense-witnesses. When he shut his eyes he could hear better. Then he knew for sure. Out there something lurked, synchronizing its moves with the spent snarls of the wind. From the screen of purple heather it appraised with infinitely curious, discerning care. He forced himself to stand. It came as a sorrow more than a relief to know he had nothing to fear. He was being bypassed for rarer prey.

The dog reappeared. Its head arched, making sure it had reached the right spot. It stood as if paralyzed by the task of leaving some proof of how far it had advanced. It tried to buy time by breaking into a howl. Then the woolly flanks quivered as if under the weight of some inexpressible caress. Making sure more timorous comrades could see, Malcolm raised one hind leg and began relieving himself on the juncture between the granite and the grass.

The Survivor

MARIE DEANS

AARON MOVED gently in the swing, waiting, half-hoping, knowing better. He liked early summer. The stillness let the good sounds come through, the warm rustle of breeze moving through the grove, the mosquitoes and night bugs droning beyond the screening, the slow creak of the swing, the slam of a screen door.

"Aaron?"

"Out here."

Annie's thickening body dropped down beside him, jolting the swing. He put his feet down and sat still.

"She can't come just yet," Annie said.

He got up and stood at the screen door, looking out just beyond the lawn. He had tried not to hope that Carol would come right away. He couldn't handle the intimacy that Annie seemed to need these last few weeks. He was constantly on his guard against her, yet he didn't want to deny her what she needed. Carol could answer those needs, could talk to her, could respond to those penetrating looks. Now that she was grown, she and Annie seemed to have an understanding that went beyond the usual mother-daughter relationship. He wondered once again if he could have had an understanding like that with a son.

"When?"

"A couple of weeks. One of the other girls in the office is on vacation. Carol has to wait till she gets back. She said to thank you for the letter. She knew it was hard for you."

He nodded.

"If that's not soon enough, if there's an emergency or anything, you're to call."

"It won't be necessary. Two weeks is not that long."

"No, it's not. It's not long at all."

He heard beyond the words, but he was quiet. He couldn't answer her. He couldn't look at her, her face so gouged, her middle like hard marble. She looked like the product of some mad sculptor.

"I was hoping she would come for you, too. I thought you

might need her."

"Annie, I can look after things here. I wish you'd stop worrying about that."

He opened the screen door and flicked his cigarette out watching the tiny light arc across the walk and die in the wet grass.

"Well, I'm going on up." She pulled herself up from the swing, leaving it bobbing and creaking behind her. She stopped beside him and laid a cool, dry hand on his arm. He could feel a tenseness, a straining, as if he, too, were turning to stone. She stood there quietly for a long moment, then she was gone. In a minute the stair railing groaned behind him.

He latched the screen door and went back to the swing. He could hear the water running through the pipes while Annie washed her face and brushed her teeth, then the almost inaudible tap tap of the toothbrush against the sink. He knew that now she would be baring her teeth to the mirror. It was strange how routine and small life was even near its end. He wondered if it were these inconsequential, yet time consuming movements that made the waiting bearable for Annie. He heard the scraping of the bathroom door and timed perfectly the creak of a loose floor board under her felt slipper.

"Aaron, you coming up?"

He leaned over to the window. She was stooped over the railing, shielding her eyes against the hall light, trying to see him in the darkness. "In a minute, Annie."

For some reason he remembered a movie they had seen years ago about the sinking of the Titanic. Toward the end it had been brutal as some of those who had been left on board fought to be among the living, and some of the lifeboats refused to pick up survivors. It had made Annie sick. She had been quiet on the way home; then, in bed, she had reached for his hand. "You know what really made me sick, Aaron? It was not knowing what I would do if something like that happened to me. I might act like those people. I don't know. But if I did, I couldn't live with it, with the guilt." He had squeezed her hand before turning over. "You wouldn't have to, Annie." He had tried to tell himself that she was gentle and good, but he could only think of her as weak.

He smoked one last cigarette before going up. Annie, already asleep, lay facing the wall. The moonlight coming through venetian blinds slatted across her. Aaron laid his clothes over the straight chair and tucked his shoes beneath. In the bed, his body sagged toward the middle, toward the nest he and Annie had made over the years and seldom used now, might never use

again. He turned on his side to keep from rolling into that center and listened to Annie's labored breathing. He remembered her old sound, soft and throaty, like a curled cat. It had been the soothing sound he had fallen asleep to for years. Now that labored breathing, her only complaint, made sleep come later and later for him each night.

HE WASN'T accustomed to being wakened. He always woke himself at dawn, but the slight pressure on his shoulder was persistent. He opened his eyes to her body, heavy and full, leaning over him. Her hair and the hall light coming from behind her made a deep shadow across her face. He didn't move but he knew his breathing had changed, grown quicker, shorter. For a moment the years had turned back. Her face was young, and the roundness of her abdomen was life.

He sat up, and she sat beside him, leaning slightly against his shoulder. "It's pretty bad. I called Dr. Heinrich, and he said I might as well go on to the hospital now. It's only a few hours. He'll meet us."

He put his arm around her, suddenly reluctant to let her go. For weeks he had not wanted to touch her, now when the time was almost gone, he did not want her away from him. This time it was Annie who pulled away, too caught up in the pain to comfort him.

He got up and began to dress. You want me to pack a bag for you?"

"No, I did that last night."

It had been packed that night, too. Thirty-one, no Carol was thirty-two, thirty-two years ago. It's a long time, yet God how short, how quick.

It was still dark when they reached the hospital. The building itself stood stolid and gray with one long rectangle beaming out into the parking area. He helped Annie out of the car and into that light, yellow like the bug-catching light over the door to the screened porch.

Inside Dr. Heinrich took Annie's suitcase and led them to the office. The sound of their heels bounced against the half-tiled walls and fell back into the otherwise empty corridor. Dr. Heinrich pushed open the office door and pointed Annie to a chair beside an empty desk. "There's just your signature, Aaron. I've taken care of everything else." He took a step backwards into the corridor and motioned an unseen nurse.

Aaron quickly read the papers a sleepy young woman handed him. Annie was staring at a chart in front of her as if it held some code that, once broken, would provide the answer

to the riddle of her pain. He started to sign the papers, then couldn't. He remembered Donna, an old bird dog that had been hit by a car. He had wrapped her in a throw rug and taken her to the vet. She had lain so quietly, her blood oozing into the rug like a wine stain while he signed the release to put her to sleep.

A nurse pushed a wheel chair into the office and over to Annie's chair. Aaron expected Annie to protest. Instead she was uninterested. She looked up at him and quickly away as she was wheeled out. In a minute he could hear the nurse's unanswered chatter echo and then drift off down the hall.

He felt confused by the memory of the dog and the sound of the girl's fingernails tapping on the desk. He looked over at Dr. Heinrich who nodded. "Just the standard financial things for now, Aaron." He signed and pushed the papers back to the girl. Her fingernails were painted a deep red.

Dr. Heinrich stubbed out his half-smoked cigarette. "You know I'm forever telling my patients not to do this. Let's wait out here."

"I know. You told me. I still smoke a pack a day."

"Hmm. I smoke three, half-smoke them at least."

They sat in orange plastic chairs that looked more like they belonged in a cheap cafe than in the waiting room of a county hospital. Dr. Heinrich's mouth stretched out over a long, deep yawn.

"I'm sorry about this, Heinrich, getting you out of bed."

"No, no, I'm used to it. I think she's just resigned herself to the hospital, so why not get it over with? Why start another day at home?" He lit another cigarette and began making small talk, filling up the quiet. Aaron watched his mouth form the words neither of them bothered to hear. Finally Dr. Heinrich stuck his third cigarette in the sand-filled pot beside him and stood up. "I think we can go up now. She should be settled."

In the elevator he punched three and leaned back. "She's in 307. I've left an order that you can visit anytime. When's Carol coming home?"

"Annie talked to her last night. There's some problem at the office. She can't get away for a couple of weeks."

"Two weeks?"

The elevator doors shot open. Aaron felt suddenly compelled to get out, find Annie quickly, and get her back home, but Dr. Heinrich just stood beside the control panel. "Two weeks, well maybe . . ." The doors began to close and Aaron slammed them back. "You don't think she'll need to come sooner?" Dr. Heinrich came out brushing against Aaron's arm. "I don't really know, Aaron. Frankly Annie's coming early, even a few hours

early, concerns me." He stood quietly for a moment and then reached out and gently pulled Aaron's arm away from the elevator door. "Let's just see how it goes for awhile."

Following the doctor down the corridor, Aaron became aware of the smells that had permeated the hospital over the years, chemicals, disinfectants, urine, vomit, the smells of the dead and dying. Yet some people left, some people walked out.

They stopped at the nurses' station where a dozen or more vases of wilting flowers stood on the floor. He waited while Dr. Heinrich gave the nurse an order for Annie. The smell of the dying flowerheads and rotting wet stems mixed with the other smells and pushed at his memory. He shut his eyes as if to close away that part of his mind and saw a scar running down the inside of a thigh.

"Right over here, Aaron. I've ordered a shot to make her sleep, but it'll take a few minutes."

The room was gray in the chilled early light coming in the window. Dr. Heinrich reached over and switched the light on beside the bed. Annie turned her head and looked at him but did not change the flat expression on her face. "Well, are you settled in? Comfortable?" She didn't answer him. Instead she looked over at Aaron. "You don't have to stay."

"I'll stay until you sleep."

She nodded and pressed out a wrinkle in the sheet with her fingers.

Aaron and the doctor stood awkward in her silence. Again Aaron smelled the flowers. They must have come from this room. Their smell was like a thin cover over the other odors, like perfume over an unwashed woman: "A razorblade." He could hear her funny, gurgly voice. "It was meant to show the way home." Her laugh had been high-pitched, so different from the way she spoke.

Dr. Heinrich was rocking back on his heels, obviously ill-at-ease. Aaron thought he must be longing for another cigarette.

"Oh, Aaron, I couldn't do that. She would know the difference." It was Annie's voice, so real he thought for a moment that she had actually spoken, but it was only the other layer of the memory. Again he tried to push it back and felt the almost insane anger come back as it had then, not at himself or the woman (he could no longer remember her name), but at Carol and Annie. The anger that had caused him to reach out one day and smash the bottle in the sink. The smell had made him nauseated for days. Even under the shower he could smell it and see the pieces of deep blue glass and the clotted tassel lying in the sink.

"Ready for me?" A nurse stood holding the door back with her hip. Aaron took a deep breath and touched Annie's shoulder. "I'll be back this afternoon."

"Better make it this evening." The nurse held the syringe up and smiled.

DRIVING HOME through the town's empty streets his memory was like a mirror that needed resilvering. Looking into it, he saw pieces of reflection mixing with what was behind the mirror. Slowly he collected the pieces and moved them into some recognizable, though still unwanted form. The woman had happened during the war. She was a prostitute, coarse, common, further debased by the war. He had been drawn to her because she represented, not the decay of war as she had to most of the men, but the survival. She was strong, cunning, and voraciously alive. He had needed her the way some of the men needed crosses or pictures of their children. When the war was over for him he had had no further need of her, and he had forgotten her. Then years later Carol had given Annie the cheap perfume for Christmas. The next morning Annie had come out of the bathroom with the smell of that perfume on her. At first he had only known it was disgusting to him. "My God, what have you got on?" She had laughed a little. "I know. It's the perfume Carol gave me." She had come closer to put her gown in the chest of drawers, and suddenly he had smelled the woman, the whore. "Throw that stuff out. Use something else." She had looked a little surprised. "Oh, Aaron, I couldn't do that. She would know the difference." He remembered the anger that had come up in him like bile.

He swerved to avoid a dog and realized he had driven automatically and was almost home. In a minute he pulled into his drive and left the car in the yard.

The house looked like a stale party lit up in the early morning sun. Turning off lights, he went through to the kitchen and put the water on the stove for coffee. He took eggs out of the refrigerator, then put them back and got two leftover biscuits out of the breadbox. He made the coffee and then, uneasy in the kitchen, took it and the biscuits into his office off the living-room. He would work on the books until time to get the mail. Then he would come back, take a short nap, bathe and dress, and go back to the hospital.

The day dragged at him like old skin. He made too many mistakes on the books and had to quit. He got to the post office too early and had to wander around looking at yellowed posters and reminders to mail early from three Christmases past. When

the mail was finally sorted, he looked through it twice and dropped it all in the litter bin outside. He drank too much coffee and smoked too many cigarettes, and found it was too hot, and he was too itchy to take a nap. By the time he got to the hospital he felt that any passerby would be able to see the ends of his nerves just beneath his skin.

But Annie didn't seem to notice. He brushed a strand of dull gray hair off her forehead and touched his lips to the moist, yet cool skin. When he stood up again she gave his hand a quick pat. Well, have you eaten?"

"No, had lots of coffee."

"You can get something here in the cafeteria. It's not too good though."

"I might stop by the bus station on the way home and have a sandwich."

She shook her head, and they lapsed into silence. After a while she gave a little laugh.

"What?"

"I was always the one who wanted to talk."

"You don't now?"

"No." And then. "I'd really like to go on to sleep."

Embarrassed, relieved, he got up quickly.

The next few days were like a passage through an emotional warp. At home the spaces in the house would first fill with memories so alive he could feel them brush against him, and then those spaces would suddenly empty, and he could not remember what the next room looked like. In the evenings he would go to the hospital where Annie lay beneath the white sheets, starched and ironed like her own, and took little notice of the nurses and doctors, less of him. He needed, now and then, to remind them both that he was there. He would reach for her hand, but there was no strength, no return there.

She had been there ten days when he came back from the cafeteria to find her lying on her side, her eyes clear of the drugs. Seeing her alert, smiling at him was like the first moment you awaken from a nightmare and realize that it was just that and now it was over, and you had gotten through it.

"You fell asleep so I went down to grab some supper." Then he saw her wince, and it was like closing your eyes again to find, not the gentle wash of sleep, but the nightmare coming back. "Do you want your shot?"

"No, no. Sit down."

He nodded and pulled the chair up beside the bed.

"I've been going through so much. I don't mean the pain. I mean over things, trying to sort them out, understand them."

They always say that you need to set your house in order before you die. I've found out it's true."

He could almost feel death, like a current run through her body and reach out to enter his. Instinctively he drew away from her. He saw her body twitch, and she drew the covers up as if to hide from him. For the first time he felt the shame of his aliveness between them. "Annie, I'm sorry."

She shook her head still holding the covers around her.

He got up and walked around the room, aimlessly straightening cards and flowers. He heard her turn over and knew that she was watching him.

"I really wanted to do that, Aaron, set this house in order. There are things that ought to be said."

He stood at the window seeing his reflection against the darkness outside.

"You know, I always hoped that if one of us had to go, to die first, it would be you. Not because I wanted to live longer than you, I didn't. I didn't want you to find out things about yourself that would hurt you. I didn't want you to know that you are—you're not as strong as you think you are."

In the long silence that followed her words he could hear them again and again. He felt anger rise up in him and slowly dissipate.

"Aaron, for God's sake, haven't I been lonely with you long enough?"

He pressed his hands down on the cold radiator until he could almost feel the separate layers of paint that had been built up over the years. How many had there been when Carol was born? How many when Annie had broken her hip? How many more when he had had the kidney stone removed? Layer by layer their life had built up until there seemed to be no way of getting back to the beginning.

"Aaron, it's all right. I knew you were a lonely man when I married you, but I was arrogant, I guess. You see I thought I could be enough, I could make that loneliness go away. Then, finally, I knew I couldn't do that. But I could do something. I could be there. I know it doesn't seem like much, but nobody could do more for you, Aaron. Don't you see that? Don't you see that my loneliness and yours come from the same source.

He went to her now, went to her so there would be no more words to probe into him. She reached out and enclosed his hand within the two of hers. She was quiet, watching, waiting. Then she pulled his hand up to her face, kissed his palm, and let him go. She pressed the buzzer for the nurse.

Later, after the shot had taken effect, and she was asleep,

he closed the door quietly and went home. He called Carol, and she promised to be home in two days. He realized, talking to her, that he was calling for himself, not Annie. When he had hung up he poured himself a mug of stale coffee and took it out to the porch.

This had always been his place, a place that was part of and yet separated from the rest of the house. He tried to think about the grove. Would they have enough rain this year? Sometimes he would keep himself up all night worrying about a drought. He'd think about it until he could see the dark, glossy leaves begin to pucker and pull themselves in like the skin of an old woman. He moved his fingers across the back of his hand pushing the skin into dry folds. But there had been plenty of rain, and he knew the leaves were plumped out with moisture.

He shifted his weight, upsetting the smooth motion of the swing and sending tiny pricks of irritation moving up the back of his skull. No counterweight.

Once Annie had provided balance for him in another swing. It had hung under an old live oak in her father's side yard. He hadn't been sure even then why he was seeing her. She was not very pretty. She was taller than all the other girls in town and most of the boys, and her figure was more athletic than feminine. She was popular, well liked, but not in demand. Maybe even then it had just been easy. She was always there when he dropped by, obviously glad to see him. At first he had only gone when some other plan fell through, then, gradually, he began to go by more often. Before long seeing her had become the part of the day he most looked forward to. He felt comfortable with her. He could talk to her, and he could be quiet with her. She made no demands on him. He couldn't remember the first time he had kissed her, or when or how he had proposed. Somehow she had simply slipped, quietly and easily into his life. He had never allowed himself to slip into hers. He had never even thought of her as having a life to move into. She had seemed so simple, asked for so little, and been willing to give whatever she had. Even the day she had come back from the doctor's with the answer to what had been happening to her body, even then she had asked so damned little.

She had made coffee, and they had sat at the kitchen table. He had watched her fold and refold a paper napkin until it had begun to fall apart, and he had waited. He had known what she was going to say. For weeks the dreaded word had hung in the house like spider webs walked through by day and remade at night.

"Cancer," and she reached for his hand. For a while he just let her hold on, then, consciously, he began to rub his thumb over the dry knuckles of her index finger. He felt, if anything, relief. They knew for sure now. "He said it was too far gone to operate or anything like that. If I had gone sooner . . ."

He realized that she was crying. "Don't Annie. You know I won't let you suffer." She looked up. Her eyes slowly became dry and a determined hardness moved into her face. Then she got up and rinsed her cup.

Except for making a few plans about her hospitalization and when and how Carol should be told, she had not spoken of the cancer again.

He had been grateful. But what of tonight? There had been no malice in her voice, no blame. She had simply released the truth. He thought about her kiss, the way she had, wordlessly, let go of his hand. She had let him go.

He took his half-empty mug to the sink and turned the lights out. In the bed he sat up and lit a cigarette. He watched the smoke curl over to the lamp and thought of the cancer scare over cigarettes, yet Annie had been the one who had never smoked. He snuffed out the cigarette and settled down in the center of the bed.

He had not changed the sheets in the ten days that Annie had been gone. His pillowcase was limp and slightly soiled. He started to switch his pillow with Annie's. Instead he pulled her pillow down beside him and pressed his hand against the cool, starched linen. He could almost feel again the radiator, the layers. Life, day by day, year by year, had not layered itself over him and Annie. He had done that. Very slowly, her pillow pressed against him, he became aware of a gnawing loneliness within himself. All during those years together he had turned slightly away from her, but she had still been there. She had held on. Tonight she had let go. Maybe he had wanted to be free of her love, or maybe he had thought he wanted that. Now he knew if he had ever wanted that kind of freedom, he did not want it now. After thirty-six years with her, he could not be whole, he could not even be alone without Annie. He lay awake for a long time going over and over the words that he would use to let her know that no matter how little time was left for them, neither of them would be lonely in that time.

He slept well and woke full of fresh promises. He realized that he had dreamed of Annie. He didn't remember anything about the dream, only that she had been young. He thought it was a good sign. He pictured her in the hospital being bathed,

brushing her hair, now propped up on the pillow waiting for him. He dressed quickly. On the way to the hospital he remembered to be grateful that Carol wouldn't be coming until tomorrow.

He was almost to her door when he heard his name called. He turned to see Dr. Heinrich striding toward him. A nurse who had caught his eye turned quickly away. Dr. Heinrich took his arm and led him a few steps away from Annie's door. "Aaron, I was trying to call you."

"Dr. Heinrich, could we talk later? I need to see Annie now, to talk to her." He knew it was no use. "Even if it's just for a few minutes." He could see the almost imperceptible shaking of the doctor's head, but he couldn't stop. "There are things I need to say to her, things I should have said. You understand. It happens to everyone, you know. It happens." He pulled away from Dr. Heinrich's grasp and started for Annie's room.

"Aaron, listen to me." This time he took both of Aaron's arms, turning him away from her room. "There's no use going in there, Aaron. Annie is gone. She's gone."

A tall, plain young woman was slowly walking down the corridor. She kept one hand on the green tile wall to steady herself. Aaron watched her careful progress. She was coming toward him, and he was sure he recognized her. She would stop when she got to him, and he would take her hand. They would walk out together, be gone together. But she didn't stop, she didn't even look at him. She passed by and went into a room two doors up from Annie's.

Staring into the empty space the girl had left he felt his body begin to tremble. The trembling grew until he was sure it was visible. He turned around and pressed his hands and face against the cold wall. Annie. She had turned away. She had left him. Now there was no survivor left, no one to keep the panic down. He didn't remember ever crying before, not as a man, not with the full knowledge of the emptiness around him and within him. The pain of that void was almost unbearable. Why? Why in all the things that men are taught, and all the things they learn, why was it that for him how to love was always the unlearned thing? Why had life always been just beyond him? "Finally I knew I couldn't do that, but I could do something. I could be there." Annie. All these years she had kept her hands extended toward him, while his hands had withered, pressed against his own emptiness, the source of their loneliness.

Fall Back A Moment

PHILIP DACEY

Fall back a moment, let me see your eyes,
Let me touch your face. Wife, you're beautiful.
Often, I forget how much. Where's the school
Remiss fools like me go to to get wise?
Each night I lie down here with no surprise
Next to you, who are my life's miracle.
Can you forgive me that? If only you'll
Embrace me, I'll relearn Keats' "wild surmise."

And so, good night. But let's not turn away,
Let's lie here face-to-face, your hands in mine.
We'll go like this to sleep. Should we not stay
All night as we are, may it be no sign
You deny me or I you. Rather, let's say
Some dream reworked, to enrich, our design.

Marginalia . . .

(continued)

It is bound to have an effect on our own image of ourselves. As Thomas Griffin says in The Waist-High Culture, we have been a wasteful people, but we have also been a generous people, secure in the confidence that "there's more where that came from." The new world now joins the old; the assumption of endless expansion must give way to the reality of limitation, and subtle changes are already underway. The sprawling Cadillac begins to look more like the compact Mercedes.

The automobile, in fact, is likely to be the most visible symbol of the changing dimensions of the Dream. More than any other machine, the automobile has become the appropriate symbol of the technological nature of the 20th century dream. Technology has replaced the land as the means for attaining the dream, and the automobile symbolizes not only the material promise of the Dream but also many of its intangible qualities. The automobile means freedom and mobility, two qualities Americans value highly. When the world is too much with us, we jump in the car and drive in the direction of a better life.

As advertising constantly reminds us, the automobile is also a status symbol. However drab and depressing our own self-image may be, it can be rescued when we slide behind the wheel of a luxurious car whose image projects the success that we cannot experience inwardly. The Cadillac parked in front of the run-down row home may be the "vital lie" its owner needs to enable him to face the hopelessness of his daily existence.

The big car is especially appealing, since it symbolizes power as well as status. But sometimes the power is not entirely under the control of the driver, and that too is part of the appropriateness of the automobile as symbol of man's relation to technology.

The multiplication of cars within the individual family and the fact that almost anyone in America can own some kind of automobile is testimony to the success of the American economic system. This most powerful symbol of the achievement of the American Dream is within the reach of virtually every American (on an easy payment plan, of course.) Is it any wonder that millions of Americans wash and polish their cars so lovingly? They're not washing a car; they're cherishing a dream.

That's why it isn't going to be easy for Americans to accept the idea that "small is beautiful," especially when you're asking them to accept not just a smaller car but a smaller dream.

That, finally, is the real impact of the new energy program. Behind all the evolving shifts of emphasis the American Dream has undergone, there has been one constant: abundance. Our national image has been that of "the last of the big spenders." For us to become a nation of thrifty, penny-pinching conservators of a diminishing energy pile would seem to require an astounding reversal in the national character.

I think we are capable of making the adjustment, painful though it may be, but we will need some courageous politicians and businessmen to provide leadership. In the process we may discover all over again that the American Dream means having the freedom to pursue happiness, not comfort. The worst that could happen is that our traditional openness and generosity will be transformed by panic into grasping, divisive selfishness. Like Boon in the end of Faulkner's "The Bear," we may stand guard over what resources are left, saying: "Don't touch a one of them! They're mine!"

The best that could happen would be for us to learn again that the American dream has meant most when it has been conceived as a goal toward which we journey, not a kingdom at which we have already arrived.

—J.J.K.

Contributors

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